



BACKPACK

We're ready! Are you?

Volume 2

Accommodating Special Needs

Experienced CERT Program Coordinators have identified several areas that require special attention. Paying careful attention to these issues can make your program more inclusive and more successful. Special Topics presents each of these issues, together with tips for working through each as well as resources that you can refer to for more information.

Meeting the Needs of all Participants

CERT is a valuable program for everyone, and CERT Program Coordinators should encourage everyone to be involved in neighborhood and workplace preparedness.

Everyone can benefit from preparedness education and training. Many CERT Program Managers have conducted training to meet the needs of all who want it, believing that there is a place for everyone in CERT. Program managers should attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for those who want to participate.

Accommodating Special Needs

Volunteers with special needs are likely to have their own adaptive equipment or other items they need to participate in the CERT program. However, there are some accommodations that you can make to ensure that everyone gets the most from the CERT program.

Accommodating Individuals with Visual Disabilities

Common accommodations for individuals with visual disabilities include:

- Making furniture in the classroom easy to maneuver around, if possible.
- Reserving a seat near the front of the room, allowing room for guide dogs.
- Allowing the individual to orient him/herself to the room before training begins.
- Encouraging the use of a tape recorder for class notes.
- Reinforcing all visual directions with verbal cues.
- Ensuring that lighting is adequate. (Remember, not everyone who is visually impaired is completely blind.)
- Saying aloud material that is written on chart paper or projected.
- Reading through any visually presented material.
- Asking questions to verify comprehension.
- Calling the individual by name when you speak to him or her.
- Identifying yourself when you approach the individual and when you leave.
- Providing a large print version of the course materials, if possible.

Accommodating Individuals with Hearing Disabilities

Some ways by which you can accommodate individuals with hearing disabilities include:

- Allowing the individual to select his or her seat.
- Identifying the speaker, and insist on only one speaker at a time.

- Verifying that you are speaking loudly and clearly enough.
- Repeating questions asked from others.
- Summarizing discussions.
- Positioning yourself so that the hearing-impaired individual can see your face. Remain in one position as much as possible when speaking.
- Writing complex questions on chart paper.
- Ensuring that you do not stand with your back to a light source. The hearing impaired need to be able to see you.
- Allow the use of a tape recorder or ask another volunteer to provide notes.
- Modify activities as necessary. Remember that all activities are team-oriented, and that buddies and safety officers are always a requirement. These roles may be appropriate for a volunteer with a physical disability.

For additional information on Michigan Citizen Corps and the CERT program contact Michigan Citizen Corps Program Director Gary Zulinski at (517) 241-3867 or zulinskig@michigan.gov

Accommodating Individuals with Speech Disabilities

Accommodations for individuals with speech disabilities include:

- Providing opportunities for the individual to speak, but do not require it.
- Allowing the individual to express him/herself. Do not find words for him/her.
- Maintaining comfortable eye contact while the individual speaks.
- Using your regular speaking voice when addressing the individual. Do not assume that the individual also has a hearing disability.

Accommodating Individuals with Physical Disabilities

When accommodating individuals with physical disabilities, ask the individual to explain his or her limitations. Then, depending on the individual's needs:

- Verify that the setting is wheelchair accessible.